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A GIRL'S PUBERTY CEREMONY AMONG THE  
NOOTKA INDIANS

By

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*A Girl's Puberty Ceremony among the Nootka Indians.\**

BY EDWARD SAPIR, PH.D.

Presented by DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT, F.R.S.C.

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Puberty ceremonies, both for boys and girls, are widespread and characteristic features of the life of primitive peoples. Among the Nootka Indians of the west coast of Vancouver Island, as among so many Indian tribes of western America, it is the arriving at maturity of girls rather than of boys that is signalized by a definite ceremony and by the observance, on the part of the girl, of various chiefly restrictive measures or taboos. The point of time that determines the maturity of a girl is naturally considered to be the first appearance of menses. Soon after this, generally about two months later, the father or guardian of the girl gives a feast or potlatch, the essential part of which is a religious ceremony, but which is also meant to give the girl a new status in the tribe, that of one entering upon womanhood. This first ceremony is termed *'aitst'ōlā*,† which may be translated as "menstrual potlatch," from *'aitsciL* "to have a menstrual flow." Though the Nootka Indians, particularly those about Alberni, B.C., are in many respects losing hold upon the traditions of their past, they still cling tenaciously to the observance of girls' puberty ceremonies, although the rigor of the taboos formerly enforced for a length of time upon the matured girl seems to have been allowed to fall away. During a stay of about two and a half months in the fall and early winter of 1910 among the two

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†Somewhat simplified phonetic orthography is here used. *a, e, i, o, u* have typical continental (Italian) values; *e* and *o* are close, *u* open, *i* close or open; *ā* as in *father*; *ī, ō, ū* are long and close; *ē, ē, ō, ū* are long and open. <sup>4</sup> as final vowel (after *m* or *n*) is weakly articulated open *i*; <sup>u</sup> represents *u*-timbre of breath release following preceding consonant. Some consonants may need explanation. *c* as in English *she*; *t* as in *church*; *q* voiceless velar stop, i.e. *k* pronounced as far back as possible; *ʃ*, voiceless spirant of *k*-position; *ʈ*, voiceless spirantal *t*, somewhat like Welsh *ll*; *l*, affricative, of *l*-position, generally heard as *tl* or *kl*; <sup>ʔ</sup> represents glottal stop or "catch." † following consonants indicates that they are glottalized, i.e., pronounced with simultaneous glottal closure but with glottal release subsequent to their own release (their acoustic effect is of cracked or broken stops). *h* and <sup>ʔ</sup> are difficult consonants that are peculiar to Nootka; they differ respectively from *h* and <sup>ʔ</sup> in sounding rougher and more strangulated. Breath releases and stress accents are not indicated here.

tribes of Nootka Indians (*Ts!icā'atū* and *Hōpatc!as'atū*) now living on reserves near Alberni, I was fortunate enough to witness three girls' puberty potlatches. In order to give some idea of the actual conduct of such a ceremony, I shall here content myself with describing the one witnessed on the forenoon of October 16, 1910, reserving a more generalized account of the various features that go to make up puberty ceremonials among the Nootka for the future.

The present ceremony took place in the "potlatch house" of the *Hōpatc!as'atū* tribe, to which the people of both tribes had been invited by the father of the girl, Jimmie George; it was he, her paternal uncle (Big George), and another Indian related to her on her mother's side (Big Frank), that took charge of the potlatch, acting as hosts. In earlier days, when large communal houses were in use, the father or other older male relative conducting the ceremony invited the people to the house in which he lived. The people began to assemble fairly early in the morning, the men, as usual, seating themselves on the board platform along the rear wall of the house and along the left wall (as you enter), while the women disposed themselves along the right wall. Properly speaking, the seats along the rear wall are seats of honour, and in earlier days the nobility among the guests were disposed here, each being entitled to a definite seat according to his rank. Nowadays these matters are not taken so seriously, though even to-day one never sees a woman occupying one of the rear seats in the house. Back of the centre of the room, not very far from the rear wall, was burning a wood fire; a space was left on the bare ground for a fire-place, while the rest of the floor, according to up-to-date fashion, was planked. The floor of the *Ts!icā'atū* potlatch house is more conservative in this respect, being bare throughout. In front of the fire, that is, on the side towards the door, was later placed a big cauldron in which tea was boiled, to be used at the end of the potlatch to feast the people. Up against the rear wall were placed, side by side, two large rectangular boards painted in white, black, and red. The paintings of each of these boards, disposed in a reciprocally symmetrical arrangement, represented a thunder-bird holding a whale in his talons, a wolf at the upper outer corner, and a *we'il!īk* (the mythological serpent-belt of the thunder-bird, who, as he zigzags through the air or coils about a tree, causes the lightning) at the upper inner corner; beneath the whale there was a conventional representation of billows. The thunder-bird, who lives on the summit of a mountain difficult of approach, is believed, when in need of game, to fly off to the sea and catch a whale, which he then carries off to his home; the heavy flapping of his wings is what we call thunder. The thunder-bird, his serpent-belt, and the wolf are three of the most important supernatural beings of the Nootka, and figure

largely in myth, design, and masked ceremonial. Such boards as have just been described are termed *qetsāit*, literally "marked thereon," a word that is also used to apply to house boards painted on the outside. They are not restricted in use to puberty ceremonies, of which, however, they seem to be most characteristic, but may also be employed at other types of potlatch. The boards are the property of definite individuals, but, as there are only a very few sets left among the Nootka of Alberni, they have come to be considered as, in a sense, belonging to the tribe as a whole. The designs differ in different sets, but the thunder-bird and whale are nearly always the central subject.

When I entered the potlatch house, Mrs. Frank, related through her husband to the pubescent girl, was seated last on the woman's side of the house, nearest the door, and was engaged in singing, in a loud and high-pitched voice, a *ts!tqa* song, while her husband, Big Frank, beat a rapid and unbroken drum accompaniment on the other side of the house. The song was the property of her own family, or rather line of descent, the right to sing it being acquired strictly through inheritance. Each family has its *ts!tqa* song or stock of *ts!tqa* songs, no outsider being permitted to make use of them, unless deputed to do so by the owner. The melody of these songs is, as a rule, rather bald, but they have a peculiar chant-like solemnity of their own, consisting, as they do, of long drawn-out tones that tend to end up, at intervals, in half-spoken little turns that are very difficult to render adequately in notes. There are different types of *ts!tqa* songs, some, generally of greater length and melodic complexity, being used only in the course of the sacred Wolf Ritual (*lōkwāna*). Formerly the accompaniment to a *ts!tqa* song was executed by a rattle, as is still done in the case of the Wolf Ritual songs of this general type, but the one-sided hand drum or tom-tom has displaced the rattle of late. The purpose of a *ts!tqa* song seems to be primarily that of indicating that an important or noteworthy event is about to take place; thus they are frequently heard in potlatches preliminarily to the performance of a masked dance or other ceremonial activity the right to which the host has gained as a hereditary privilege (*topāti*). Very frequently several distinct *ts!tqa* songs can be heard sung at the same time. Any woman may be hired to sing her *ts!tqa* song at a menstrual potlatch, being paid for her services by the giver of the ceremony. Mrs. Frank repeated her song at intervals, while the house gradually filled up. Her husband was twice heard to beat the drum accompaniment for her, but towards the end he handed her the drum and she thenceforth accompanied herself.

As soon as most of the people had come, ten bundles of long sticks were laid on the ground, each bundle tied together, and one end of each was lit by being placed on the fire. These lighted faggots

are known as *hitema* or "torches," a word that is also used to refer to torches proper, fir branches gummed and lit at one end, that were in earlier days employed to light one on one's way. The number of ceremonial torches lit at the puberty ceremony is symbolic of the number of months after the ceremony that the pubescent girl is to spend in seclusion and be subject to the menstrual taboos. The number varies between four, six, eight, and ten, according to the tradition of her family; it is rarely less than four, for with two torches the minimum number of four months of seclusion have to be observed, nor is an odd number of torches permissible. Four seems to have been the normal number in earlier days. Each of the ten "torches" were then given to a man apiece, who filed out of the house and arranged themselves in a row, with their backs to the right wall of the house, and facing the river.\* They stood with their torches planted upright on the ground, whence the name of that part of the ceremony that takes place outside the house, *hitcapas* or "torches standing outside the house." In the centre of the row of torch-bearers was placed the pubescent girl, on either side of her a thunder-bird dancer. These wore thunder-bird masks (*!t!sk!atqoz<sup>u</sup>sim<sup>s</sup>*) and were wrapped in blankets that covered everything up clear to the masks, so that nothing of the faces or bodies of the dancers was visible. Meanwhile four other men put down on their hair and bedaubed their cheeks with red paint; down and red paint are often used to symbolize a festive occasion, but have no further significance in this connection. Each of the four held a basin in his hands. One after the other they proceeded to the river, which was but a few yards from the house, dipped up water, returned in the same order to the girl, and each in order rapidly turned a short counter-clockwise circuit in front of her and quickly poured out the water at her feet. The four men, always in the same order, again dipped up water, returned to the girl, turned counter-clockwise circuits, and poured out the water at her feet. These actions were gone through four times in all; four, as among many other West Coast tribes, is the ceremonial or sacred number. At the same time the thunder-bird dancers moved their arms up and down within their blankets to imitate the flapping of the thunder-bird's wings, while a rattling noise, representing the sound of thunder, was heard to come from inside the potlatch house. The noise, as I learned, was produced by shaking stones in tin wash-basins. As soon as the last basinful of water had been poured out at the girl's feet, all returned inside the house, the still burning "torches" were extinguished, and the four men that had dipped up and poured out the

\*Somas River, which flows out of Sprout Lake into Alberni Canal. It runs along the length of the potlatch house.

water brushed off their down. This concluded the *hūcapas*. It may be noted that there seems to be no particular rule followed in the choice of the torch-bearers, thunder-bird dancers, or water-pourers, none of these as such exercising an inherited privilege.

I could obtain no explanation of the symbolism of the ritual, which, so far as the Indians of to-day are concerned, is simply accepted as a matter of custom. It is evident, both from the thunder-bird painting and the employment of thunder-bird masks, that there is some association between the arriving at maturity of a girl and the thunder-bird, but I have not as yet ascertained its nature. Not all lines of descent, however, use the thunder-bird. The water-pouring also is clearly symbolic in origin, but it is difficult to say now wherein lies its significance. Perhaps it is permissible to see in it a ceremonial cleansing, a washing away of the impurity that is so universally associated among primitive peoples with the state of menstruation. The girl played no further part in the puberty ceremony. Properly speaking, she should, immediately after the *hūcapas* ceremony was concluded, have gone behind the painted boards, to begin a four days' wake and fast. In the present case this was dispensed with, the more rigorous features of ceremonial activity tending, on the whole, to disappear first among the Nootka Indians. Only chiefs and wealthy people, it may be observed, possessed such painted board screens, the common people contenting themselves with ordinary mat screens.

When all had again seated themselves in the house, Charlie Tlutisi, who acted as the ceremonial speaker (*tsiqaql*) for the hosts (the girl's father and uncle), distributed the "torches" to ten of the guests. He called out various names, after each of which a young man (*yatsmūtsi* "one who walks about in the house," any young fellow that is asked to serve as an attendant for the guests or to carry out the speaker's directions) took a "torch" and carried it to the one thus designated, laying it in front of him on the ground. In former times a gift, such as one or more blankets, was tied on to one end of the "torch." This time the gift, which should always go with the assignment of a "torch," was given a little later on, during the potlatch proper, in the shape of a coin, the names of the recipients being called out as before and the coins distributed by the same young man. The speaker explained that the money given with the "torches" was what fell off of the thunder-bird while it caused the thunder by flapping its wings during the *hūcapas* ceremony. Such fictions or metaphors, it is interesting to note, are of frequent occurrence in the ceremonial life of the natives. The recipients of the "torches" are supposed to take them home, put them away in a corner at the back of the house, and preserve them for some time for "good luck." The right to receive a "torch" inheres as a privil-

age in certain definite lines of descent and was formerly jealously guarded; in other words, it forms what the Nootka Indians call a *topāti*. The "torches" should be distributed in order, according to the rank of the persons receiving them. Among the Nootka Indians of Alberni it is customary for the holder of a "torch" *topāti* to return the value of the gift with 100 per cent. interest to the donor at a second and more elaborate potlatch given by the latter for the girl some time after the puberty ceremony. This is in accord with the general practice of the West Coast Indians to return potlatch gifts, generally with 100 per cent. interest, at some future time. It is anomalous, however, insofar as it nullifies, from a purely economic point of view, the value of the inherited privilege or *topāti*. There are several other such ceremonial privileges among these Indians that bring with them not emolument, but net loss. However, the Indians say that they are proud in this way to make public their claim on the *topāti* and that they count the trifling loss of no moment in comparison with the upholding in this way of their prestige. The paying back of gifts obtained by virtue of one's right to a *topāti* is quite likely, however, to turn out to be a comparatively recent development among the Nootka of Alberni, for other Nootka tribes, such as the Ueluelet of Barkley Sound, do not practice the custom. These last, as I was informed, laugh at the Alberni Indians on this account; they do not see the use of having a privilege that nets one a loss.

When the "torches" had been distributed, the girl's uncle and others of the family got together in a small group near the door of the house, ready to arrange a performance that was intended to be a feature of the puberty potlatch. Among them was the young chief Louis of the *Hó'á'atn* tribe of Numakamis Bay, who was related to the family of the girl and who had recently come up to Alberni on a visit; he placed himself on a low improvised platform on the left side of the house above the rest of the group and, like the others, stood facing the guests in the rear of the house. Mrs. Frank and another woman, who formed part of the group, each sang a *ts!tga* song, thus giving all to understand that a *topāti* performance of the hosts was to take place immediately. Then the girl's uncle started a song without drum accompaniment, which was very soon taken up by the others in the group, one of them now beating an accompaniment on the hand drum. This song was the property of the girl's father's family and none outside of the small group joined in the singing. Often a family song of this type, sung at a girl's puberty ceremony, was composed for that special purpose and kept secret until it was sprung as a surprise on the guests at the ceremony itself. A few women danced to the song; they held one arm under their shawls, while the other was bent outward

palm up, the dance itself consisting of a gentle swaying or turning by gradual rhythmically ordered steps from side to side for the space of about a quarter circle, not of a series of definitely progressing steps.

After the song was completed, the speaker proceeded to explain that a game was to be played, the right to which was held by the host as a *topāti*. A bunch of short sticks was taken and bound together around the middle; they were all white at one end, but two among them were declared to be red at the other. The sticks were handed over to Louis, who, standing on his platform in plain sight of all, held the bunch with the white ends pointed towards the people. Whoever among the guests succeeded in picking out one of the marked sticks was to receive a dollar from the girl's father, while the other red, which was specially marked in some way, would win its guesser two dollars. As soon as this had been explained by the speaker, the same song was sung as before. It was sung once again and was then followed by another family song of the same type, which was sung twice. Meanwhile, while the singing was actually going on, but not during the pauses between the songs, various people walked up, almost always in twos, to try their luck. One of the dancing women pulled out a stick, which, as it turned out to be red, she held up so that everyone might see, continuing with her dance at the same time. When a sufficient number had guessed, the money was paid out as announced, two who had come near to guessing a red being also given something. It is a general practice among these Indians for the host always to do a little better in the way of distributing gifts than he announces, whereby his liberality is made more manifest. At other puberty ceremonies that I have witnessed other such *topāti* games were played. These differ quite considerably in detail, but all have in common the giving of rewards to such as make successful trials. In some of these games the element of a test of endurance, strength or skill comes in very clearly, less conspicuously in the game just described. I speak of this because the symbolic idea that lies back of these puberty ceremonial games is the same as the test theme which is so common in aboriginal American suitor myths. In these the hero is not allowed to marry the girl whose hand he seeks until his prospective father-in-law has put him through a series of severe tests, generally such as involve danger of life. So also in the more innocent puberty ceremonial tests, as I was definitely informed, there is present the idea that only such a one will eventually be allowed to marry the girl as will, when suing for her hand, succeed in the test or trial submitted to him. In actual practice this may be a fiction, of course. In typical cases the game is a dramatization of a suitor incident in the ancestral legends owned by the family of the girl. Here, then, legend, game, and song form a cohering *topāti* unit, exactly as in the



case of inherited dances performed at potlatches, where legend, dance, mask, and song form another such unit.

After the game was disposed of, the women started in to sing *!amā* songs, which are generally sung at puberty ceremonies, though songs of the same style are also in use elsewhere. These have a rather bright and rapid movement to them and are accompanied by briskly executed drum beats. To drum well and precisely for a *!amā* song, indeed, is considered quite an art. Differing in this respect from so many types of Nootka songs, they are not, as a general rule, the exclusive property of particular families, but are popular tunes that may be used by all. One of the women who were seated on the floor beat an accompaniment on the hand drum, while other women beat sticks or clapped hands in the same rhythm. Several women danced or rather swayed as for the other songs, except that both hands were held out and, at certain beats, held to one side of the body and parallel to each other. The texts of *!amā* songs are in part burdens, in part connected words that are often sung out loud while the drum stops beating, so that all may hear clearly. The reason of this is that, while the tunes and burdens are well known and preserved intact, the texts proper (or "choruses," as they were sometimes termed by my interpreters) are very frequently changed to suit the occasion. A *!amā* singer or singers will often get up surprises in this way. The content of the texts is of a satirically sexual character, very often a jibe aimed at some man who was known to have done something of a sexual character to make him seem ridiculous. Thus, the words of one of the songs were to the effect: "When a man hugs a woman, he is not supposed to suck her breasts," evidently a sally at somebody's expense. Some women are said to be particularly expert at making up such *!amā* texts and are called *!a'mīk*. After the women had sung and danced a number of these songs, the drum was handed over to one of the men. It was now the men's turn to sing *!amā* songs, which they now proceeded to do to the accompaniment of drum and beating of planks, leveling good-humored shafts of ridicule at the opposite sex. In this way the men and women relieved each other from time to time, singing one *!amā* song after another. A spirit of high good-humor prevailed, with plenty of laughter. The men's and women's *!amā* songs are quite distinct; sometimes the former will join in with the women in their songs, very rarely, if at all, the women in the men's songs.\*

\*The singing of satirical songs at a girl's puberty ceremony finds a rather striking parallel among the Diegueño Indians of Southern California, among whom, at a girl's adolescence ceremony, it is customary to sing "bad" songs in ridicule of people of other villages who have recently died. See T. T. Waterman, *The Religious Practices of the Diegueño Indians*, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 8, 1910, p. 290.

Meanwhile a small potlatch or distribution of gifts by the girl's family was in progress. This potlatch was not so much in honor of the pubescent girl herself as of the infant daughter of her brother Hamilton George; she was thereby "made high" and they thus indicated how much they thought of the little member of their family. The potlatch for the pubescent girl, according to the speaker's announcement, was to be given later on in the season, after all the Indians had dried their salmon for the winter; the exact time to be fixed for this event, however, was still left open and was to be announced, according to a rather pleasing fiction, whenever the girl's infant niece should make up her mind to have it. At a puberty potlatch, such as was now going on, anyone has the right to ask for whatever he wants of the one who conducts it, and it must be given to him; this is known as 'o'yā'īl "to ask for a gift in a tlāmā song." The proper way to do this is to sing out one's request to the tune of a tlāmā song, improvising the words as a "chorus" so as to fit the melody. Sometimes requests for gifts have been made quite some time before, and are then granted at the puberty ceremony. In such cases the speaker announces that such and such a person had asked for a certain thing and that it was going to be granted to him now, after which the article is displayed and handed over to him or her. It is said that some people used to be rather unreasonable in their tlāmā requests. Thus, according to one informant, a man once asked beforehand for a sheep. As there was none to be had thereabouts, the man that intended to give the puberty potlatch had to go down to Victoria, B.C., for the express purpose of purchasing the animal desired. He came back with two sheep, which he presented at his potlatch to the man that had made the request, for, as has already been noted, in fulfilling a request or promise, the host always aims to act more liberally than seems strictly called for.

In the present case, one of the gifts that had been asked for was a gill-net. This was accordingly now produced, a pair of paddles and oar-locks being added as an extra, for, as the speaker remarked, in assigning the gift, its receiver might find an extra outfit of paddles and oar-locks come in handy when going out fishing in his canoe with his new net. So also in other cases, the aim was always evident to make the extra gift appropriate, even if only theoretically so, and to make some remark in explanation of its appropriateness. Another man had asked for a dog. When this was given to him, a long new rope was added, ostensibly for the purpose of tying the dog. The man, as he received the dog and rope, jocosely remarked that he would use them to keep the women at a distance when they followed him in the bush. This was in keeping with the spirit of raillery that now obtained

between the men and women. A woman had asked for a sideboard. This was brought in and chairs added as the extra. Still another woman asked for some chewing-gum, for, as she explained, in passing basket splints through her mouth in order to wet them for basket-making, she was apt to get dry, and she therefore wanted something that would provide a steady flow of saliva. Accordingly, she was given a dollar and a half with which to buy the gum. In accepting the money, she said that she did not want it for herself, but for a friend of hers; this was a fiction intended to show that she had no hard feelings and was not covetous. Another old woman wanted an iron root-digger; she was given this, with an extra of several yards of calico. Still another woman received some pillows. In some cases, the women who were engaged in singing *!lamā* songs improvised words of thanks for some of the gifts to fit the *!lamā* tunes.

After the requests had been granted, smaller monetary gifts were distributed to various people in the house; Big Frank also distributed some fishing tackle to each of the men. All were now in high good-humor. Douglas, one of the *Ts'icū'atū* men, expressed the wish that "the white man" (as I was the only white man present, he referred to myself) give him a bottle of gin. Entering into the spirit of substitutory gifts, I thereupon sent over a dollar to him, to do with as he saw best. As reciprocating the friendly spirit thus shown, several return gifts were made to me on the spot. Big Frank presented me with a salmon-spear point, while one of the *Hōpatc'as'atū* women gave me a twilled cedar-bark mat and a basketry-covered ink-well, such as are nowadays made for sale by the Nootka women. Douglas' return gift was accompanied by thanks expressed in two *!lamā* songs sung by some of the men; Douglas, it may be remarked, is considered one of the most expert of the *!lamā* singers among the Indians. While these two songs were being sung, Mr. Bill, another *Ts'icū'atū* Indian, danced while holding out a stick at arm's length between his palms. The dance consisted of a series of short steps within the range of about a quarter circle, now pivoted about one foot, now about the other, while the dancer sometimes held the stick high above his head, sometimes straight ahead, and then again vertically on a side. These rather briskly careering solo dances in which the gift, or its representative, is held or displayed, are characteristic accompaniments of such *!lamā* songs as are sung with the presentation of a gift. When he had finished dancing, Mr. Bill announced that the stick stood for an old whaling harpoon and lanyard that Douglas was giving me. I was then requested to go up and accept the stick in token of the gift itself. Later in the day Douglas himself brought me the harpoon and lanyard. This method of delivering a token, where the gift itself is either not at

hand or, as in the case of a canoe, is too cumbersome an object to be easily handled at the potlatch, is well established among the West Coast Indians.

Some time in the course of the potlatch, Tom, a blind and conservative old *Ts!icā'atn* Indian, delivered a rather long speech, in a loud hoarse voice, thanking the hosts and explaining how they had the right to the performance of the *topāti* game that all had witnessed. As his speech threatened to be too long, one of the women shouted out to him that his daughter-in-law wanted to sing a *!amā* song, whereupon Tom submissively took the hint and rapidly brought his words to a close. Thereupon old David, a small and rather decrepit *Ts!icā'atn*, also began to make a speech of thanks, but nobody listened to him and his voice was soon drowned in the noise of singing and talking. These speeches of thanks, it may be noted, are set affairs, the contents of which are more or less rigidly prescribed by custom and varying somewhat according to the family that the host addressed is a member of. Hence, as all the Indians have generally heard these speeches any number of times, their repetition is almost entirely a matter of form and but little attention is paid to them.

Towards the end of the potlatch tea and biscuits were served to all on planks which had been put down on the ground before each. The speaker announced that the names of the pubescent girl and of two of her female relatives, her brother Hamilton George's infant daughter and another brother's wife, had been changed. Her former name had been *Tēnisō* (apparently one of the stock of Coast Salish names that are current among the *Hōpat!as'atn*, who, according to reliable evidence, once spoke a now extinct Salish language); the new name given to her was *Lūlismāyul*. "makes the whirring noise (of the thunder-bird) wherever she goes," a name which was said to have originally belonged to the Makah Indians of Cape Flattery, Washington, the southernmost Nootka tribe. The change of name of a pubescent girl at the puberty ceremony is obligatory. Changes of name, whether for reasons of taboo or otherwise, are regularly made public at the end of some feast or potlatch in progress at the time. After the feast the Indians disbanded.

This will serve to give an idea of the course of a typical puberty ceremonial or *'aitst!ōh* among the Nootka. The main features involved are the "torch" and water-pouring ceremony with accompanying thunder-bird or other dance, the distribution of the "torches," the performance of one or more games which the father or guardian of the girl claims as a hereditary privilege, the singing of satirical *!amā* songs of sexual content, a potlatch given by the girl's people, and the assignment to her of a new name. The details naturally differ considerably, partly owing to the varying circumstances of each case (this would apply more particularly

to the potlatch proper, always necessarily the most flexible part of a ceremonial), partly to the exercise of varying *topāti* features, and partly owing to differences in the exact rendering of ceremonial elements that depend on the varying traditions of different families (thus, in a puberty ceremonial that took place two weeks later among the *Ts!icā'atn* there were only one thunder-bird dancer and four "torches").

We left the pubescent girl at the end of the "torch" ceremony. The rest of this paper may be appropriately taken up with a brief account of the menstrual seclusion and taboos that were formerly rigidly enforced but are now only laxly, if at all, attended to. At the puberty ceremonial the girl is supposed to wear over her forehead an ornamented head-band known as a *ts!isāsīm*<sup>5</sup>. This consists of a horizontal row of strips of sea-lion or other skin strung with dentalia; sometimes the head-band of a chief's daughter consists of two such rows, one being less in length than the other. The *ts!isāsīm*<sup>5</sup> is covered solid with dentalia for its full length around the head. For the first four days following the "torch" ceremony (a period known as *'aitsaqō'i*) the girl must stay behind the painted boards (or mat screen) night and day. During this period she must not eat or drink anything; she must not sleep, but must remain seated with folded arms; she must not scratch her body with her fingers, but must use a cedar-stick scratcher (*kits'yak*) for the purpose. An even number of girls (generally six, eight, ten or twelve) sit with her and sing *!amā* songs for her more or less continuously; they are known as *'aitsō'i*. Older women sit around in front of the boards and help sing; the father or guardian of the girl pays the girls and women for their singing. No men are allowed behind the boards. The girl is allowed to go out of the house for the necessities of nature only once during the twenty-four hours, at night, so that no one may see her.

At the end of this period of rigorous seclusion, the pubescent girl, often accompanied by three or four other girls in the same condition as herself, goes out unseen to a creek and takes ten or other appropriate number of bunches of hemlock branches (*fič!im*<sup>6</sup>), each of which she ties about at one end. She washes herself vigorously with each of these once, then lays them down against a log with their "heads" pointing to the east. This is supposed to keep her from getting old quickly. Bathing and rubbing oneself with hemlock branches are (or were) very frequently indulged in by the West Coast Indians in connection with secret prayers for health, long life, or powers of various sorts. The bathing of the girl cleanses her from the impurity of her condition and marks the end of the first period of taboo. She is now termed *'aits!āt* "one who has done with her menstrual (period)." In distributing the gifts at the main (second) puberty potlatch the speaker always

remarks that so and so is presented with such and such a gift "for having finished his bathing." This alludes, of course, to the bathing of the girl, she being supposed to have bathed for all.

She then dons a hair ornament known as a *hohopqtsitim*<sup>4</sup> (which may be literally translated as "round objects at the sides of the head"); this is worn at the sides of the head, the hair being braided and made into two round clumps which are put into its two sides. As soon as this article of headwear is put on, the girl may begin to partake of food. There now starts for the girl a longer period of less rigorous taboos (*nomāk*) which lasts, from the day of the puberty ceremony, for as many months as there were "torches" employed therein. During this period (excluding, of course, its first four days) she may eat dried salmon or other fish, but fresh fish is strictly tabooed to her; if she transgresses this taboo, it is believed that she will get old quickly. She must also eat no fresh meat of any kind, such as whale meat, seal meat, or venison; nor should she drink any but cold water, for else, it is believed, her teeth will soon fall out. She has a comb of yew wood tied to a cord around her neck, with which alone she is allowed to touch her hair for the ten or other appropriate number of months; should she use her fingers on her hair, it will soon fall out. The hair-comb is decorated with the carving of a snake, eagle, or man's face. She must go to bed after everyone else has retired, and she keeps under her blanket a little toy wedge (*Latsaqlil* "to sleep with a wedge,") which she cuddles under her blanket like a baby. If she goes to bed after the others and always gets up first, she will live a long life. During this period of menstrual taboo, whenever the girl is outside the house or goes into a canoe, she must have her yellow-cedar bark cape (*Litiniik*) tied around her hair and falling behind; otherwise her hair will soon fall out. Evidently two main ideas are involved in these and similar menstrual taboos—that of the impurity of the menstrual state itself and the consequent necessity of avoidance of too close contact with the normal world, which would suffer defilement (the infraction of the taboo against fresh fish and meat would doubtless bring about the anger of the fish and game animals and would thus lessen the game supply); and that of the training of the girl for her future duties as wife and mother (she must learn to get up early and be useful around the house; cuddling the toy wedge is evidently a training, by sympathetic magic, of the maternal instinct, or it may be intended to bring about fertility). These two ideas and, indeed, the taboos and practices that go with them are peculiarly widespread in aboriginal America.

At the end of the longer period of taboo all the people may be invited by the father or guardian of the girl to a potlatch known as the

*'aits'ato*, which may be literally translated as "menstrual (period) falls off (*i.e.* has come to an end)." The guests are informed that she has finished her period of taboo and are feasted and presented with gifts. Potlatch and *t'amā* songs are sung and *topāti* dances and games are performed.

There are thus three potlatches or ceremonials normally given in connection with the arriving at maturity of a girl:—the puberty ceremonial proper or *hītcapas*, which begins her period of taboo; the potlatch given in her honor or main *'aitst!ōłt*, which may or may (more normally) not coincide with the potlatch given at the time of the puberty ceremonial (in the case of the ceremonial we have described this second potlatch was promised but not definitely announced; it took place about a month later in conjunction with a "wolf ritual" or *Lōkwāna* given by the girl's father), at which the "torches" are returned with return gifts at 100 per cent. interest; and the *'aits'ato*, which ends her period of taboo.\*

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\*Cf. F. Boas' report on "The Nootka," British Association for the Advancement of Science, Sixth Report on the North-Western Tribes of Canada, pp. 40-42. Boas gives a drawing of a painted board-screen, also two *t'amā* songs.